

# What You're Thinking of is Accents

Let's start by discussing musical accents. There's a slight difference between musical accents and dance accents, however understanding both will help you better incorporate accents into your flow. (Why? Well because a lot of people see others' dancing and believe that in order to look like they do, to achieve another aesthetic that they need to embody an adjective such as fluid, hard, sensual, graceful, or whichever one. Those adjectives are good tools for provoking feelings and emotions in your movement, but to embody any or all of these characteristics in your dancing, you need to understand how to accentuate your movement, bringing those feelings to the forefront for your audience. Accentuate means to make noticeable or prominent. Think highlight, spotlight, feature, and or emphasize.

So when discussing musical accents, we're talking about the parts in the music when the beat changes in speed, volume, and tone. You can also experience musical accents with the duration notes are held. For musicians, they are typically indicated on sheet music. These different markings instruct on how that particular note should be accentuated in the music. **(We're going to come back to this for the movement portion.)**

## Types of Musical Accents

- Metrical Position (weak or strong)
  - Think of time signatures in music (4/4, 3/4), this means that each bar (measure) has 4 main beats or 3 main beats (each main beat equals a quarter note and know that because of the /4 in the time signature). The first beat will be the strongest while the corresponding beats will be weaker
- Dynamic (loud or soft volume)
  - They come about when a note is played louder than the rest of the notes around it
  - In sheet music, dynamic accents are only marked if they occur during the weaker beats
    - Accenting unexpected beats, which are typically the weaker ones, causes dissonance or syncopation (disturbance or disruption in the regular flow of the rhythm).
- Agogic/duration (long or short)
  - This is when a note is held for a longer or shorter time than the notes around it
    - Occurring during the strong notes emphasizes the accent even more (the first note is inherently accented)
    - Occurring during the weak beats will also create a disruption in the flow (syncopation)
- Tonic (high or low pitch)
  - A note or melody can progress by
    1. A step
      - A minor second (encompasses two adjacent notes on a music scale) or major second (encompasses two semitones or two minor seconds)
      - On a keyboard, a minor second would be a white key and the black key next to it, a major second would be an interval between two white keys with one black in the middle
    2. A leap
      - Note intervals move greater than a major second
    3. Repeated tone motion
      - Repeating the same note

So now that we've learned just a bit of music theory to ruminate on while you're alone in the physical and/or trapped in your creative mind. Take that time to pause and disconnect from the thoughts and get into the music. Consider the emotions it brings up, the visuals it

brings to mind, and allow those prompts to guide our movement. That leads us to the dance accents. I love accents so much because that is the life, emotion, and story your movement. I'm also completely fascinated by the interchangeable relationship between musical and dance accents. Clearly, dance accents are influenced by the musical accents, or the musical accents are interpreted through dance accents. Besides the obvious, artistic freedom opens up wider than you initially could have thought when you mix up accenting the beat and the words. There are several ways to do this with a beat or instrumental by following the various beat patterns and disruptions to the those patters with speed, texture, and dynamism of your movement. If your song has lyrics to it, then this opens up the fun even more.

Lyrics will tend to switch flows to add emphasis to certain lyrics and/or to make the song more aurally interesting. You can use these changing flows in pitch, volume, and even speed to inform the same in your movement. The interesting part is when the movement and lyrics juxtapose with the beat or vice versa. This allows for the dance to be more visually attractive and/or magnetizing. Instead of just moving around skillfully to the beat, you become a storyteller, a visionary. The movement transforms from combinations of technical skills, to a cerebral idea come to life for you and your audience to experience simultaneously. A truly entertaining performance, to me, is when the artist and the audience share an intimate and moving moment with each other without ever having to explain our stories and our hearts' memories. You're dance can start off smooth and gentle, moving to emotional and frantic, back to soft, and then go into being dark and menacing. What takes people time to understand, is that, it isn't just your facial expression or the style assigned to articular movements that make the performance entertaining and provocative, it's the stylization and the attitude of the move which are greatly portrayed through accentuation.

#### Types of dance accents

- The downbeat
  - The first beat of a musical measure
    - Remember our metrical position accents, this is how the musical accents correlate with the movement accents and also how we can explore creating a new flow of syncopation (disturbance is the usual flow)
- The 1
  - The one is the first beat of a musical phrase (there are typically 4 measures in a musical phrase or 4 downbeats)
- The legato note
  - Longer drawn out notes with softer, smoother, more emotional phrases in the music
- The staccato note
  - Sharp or sudden beats
  - Full of passion, fire, and more energy
- The break
  - Literal breaks in sound that create tension and anticipation

Technicalities are important in dance to keep you safe, to help you better understand movement variations, and to improve your technique. However, they are not the only important factors involved in dance. Like any art form, the passion, emotion, and creative interpretation are just as important to your dancing, if not more. We learn the basics first so that we ingrain the information into our muscle memory, allowing our creative mind to transform the technical movements into living art that communicates, informs, and/or provokes the audience and even yourself. When we just perform the moves without actual intention and emotion, we are doing disservice to ourselves and our art. The art always comes from somewhere, it doesn't always have to be from the dark depths of your soul, but it absolutely is born from an instinctual place tied to your mood and your circumstances. Generic art can be nice to look at, but without true intent behind it, it quickly loses it's sparkle as there is nothing honestly interesting or moving or even unique about it. You may not be the first to do something, but no one can copy your personal signature signed to everything you put your heart into.

